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ABSTRACT

The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) is a self-report, Likert-type scale consisting of 67 statements that allude to various aspects of the experience of adjusting to college. The SACQ yields five indices: a full-scale score and subscale scores for each of four aspects of adjustment to college (academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and goal commitment/institutional attachment). The SACQ can be used as a source of dependent variables in studies of factors affecting student adjustment to college or as a way to identify students who are experiencing difficulty in their adjustment to college. Reliability of the SACQ has been assessed by Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Early studies of the questionnaire's validity focused on an examination of differential relation between subscales and events in students' lives presumed to differentially involve the operation of the variables measured by the subscales. Additional studies constitute examples of construct validity. The findings to date derive from studies at two institutions only. There is a need for further research to establish the usefulness of the SACQ across a range of colleges and universities. (NB)

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THE STUDENT ADAPTATION TO COLLEGE QUESTIONNAIRE AND ITS USE IN AN INTERVENTION STUDY WITH FRESHMEN

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The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire and its Use in an Intervention Study With Freshmen

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I would like to divide my talk into two parts. The first will be a description of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (or SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1986, in press), with a summary of available reliability and validity data. The aim of the first part is to provide background to facilitate understanding of other talks to follow. The second part will be a description of our initial attempt at practical use of the SACQ in intervention.

Because of time limitation, the material to be included here is highly condensed and simplified. More detailed information is available in published reports (see appended listing).

The SACQ is a self-report, Likert-type scale consisting of 67 statements that allude to various aspects of the experience of adjusting to college. Each statment has a 9-point scale, on which the student is asked to indicate the degree to which the particular statement applies to him or her. The Questionnaire yields 5 indices: a full-scale score and subscale scores for each of 4 aspects of adjustment to college -- academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment, and goal commitment/institutional attachment (hereafter referred to as attachment).

The SACQ may be used in at least two ways. First it can be a source of dependent variables in studies of factors affecting student adjustment to college. These kinds of studies could be for strictly research purposes, or they could include very practical attempts to assess effects on students of such factors as living arrangements, special counseling programs, variations in financial support, or, in other words, virtually any of those factors that fall in the domain of the student personnel worker.

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A second possible use of the SACQ would be to identify students who are experiencing difficulty in their adjustment to college, including identification of kinds of difficulties, as preparation for more effective interventions and more efficient use of resources. An advantage of this second type of use is that it would help to circumvent the fact, as noted in the literature by several investigators, that students -- even very needy ones -- tend not to take advantage of helping services offered to student bodies at large.

Reliability of the SACQ has been assessed by Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Median values from 14 Clark University and Holy Cross College samples are: Academic Adjustment subscale, .87; Social Adjustment subscale, .89; Personal-Emotional

Adjustment subscale, .82; Attachment subscale, .90; and full-scale, .93.

Early studies of the Questionnaire's validity focussed on examination of differential relation between the several subscales, on the one hand, and, on the other, various events in students' lives presumed to differentially involve the operation of the variables measured by the 4 subscales. Thus, it was found -- in a number of freshman samples over several years -- that freshman year grade point average and subsequent election to Phi Beta Kappa in the junior and senior years are more highly correlated with the Academic Adjustment subscale, as would be expected, than with the other subscales; that participation in social activities in the freshman year and selection as a dormitory assistant toward the end of the sophomore year are more highly correlated with the Social Adjustment subscale than with the other subscales; that being known during the freshman year to a psychological services center is more highly correlated with the Personal-Emotional subscale than with the other subscales; and that withdrawal from college is more highly correlated with the Attachment subscale that with the other subscales. Please note the use here of criterion and discriminant forms of validation.

Other early studies showed that the SACQ reflected adjustment differences among students varying in personal characteristics measured prematriculation -- i.e., academic motivation, social propensity, and alienation -- that were expected to be related to effectiveness of adjustment to college, and did so differentially for the subscales in expected ways.

Additional studies constitute examples of construct validation. Calvin Graham, in research for a Master's thesis at Clark University using the SACQ as a source of dependent variables, showed that the amount of difficulty experienced by black students in adjusting to predominantly white colleges was -- as he predicted -- inversely related to amount of prior interracial experience.

Another investigation showed that the so-called "freshman myth" first described by George Stern -- i.e., the fact that matriculating freshmen anticipate more from the college environment than they subsequently realize -- applies also to self-assessed adjustment to college. In other words, matriculating freshmen expect more from themselves in adjusting to college than they subsequently realize. Furthermore, freshmen who experience this disillusionment, by comparison with those who do not, earn lower grade point averages and fewer course credits in the freshman year, are less likely to win annual academic honors in the freshman and subsequent years or to be awarded honors at graduation, are more likely to be known to a psychological services center during the freshman year, are more likely to withdraw from college, and less likely to graduate on time.

As we will hear shortly in Markie Smith's presentation, the SACQ reflects differences between freshmen with and without majors, including differential findings of the sort that would be expected for the several subscales.

A final example of construct validation is the initial use of the SACQ in intervention that I will now describe.

Freshmen who entered Clark University in the Fall of 1981 were administered the SACQ about the middle of the first semester. Those students one standard deviation or more below the means on the 4 subscales were identified and divided into matched control and experimental groups. Members of the control group were left alone, and those in the experimental group were invited for individual feedback interviews.

Because the purpose of the interview was feedback of test information, the SACQ served as the source of topics for discussion, including indications of difficulty experienced by the student, and did so very fruitfully. Toward the end of the second semester, the SACQ was redistributed to all members of both the control and experimental groups, for comparison with pre-test scores in assessing effects of interview.

Please note that the SACQ was used in this study in three ways: to identify students at risk and divide them into control and treatment groups; to provide topics for discussion in interview; and to assess the consequences of intervention.

The students who were interviewed, by comparison with those who were not, showed significantly greater improvement in scores from pre- to post-test on three of the four subscales and the full-scale. More provocative, a finding aching for replication, significantly fewer of them withdrew from college. The attrition rate in the interviewed students was almost precisely half that of the non-interviewed students.

It should be noted carefully that all of the findings reported here, and all of our publications to date, derive from studies at two institutions only. The usefulness of the SACQ across a range of kinds of colleges and universities is yet to be demonstrated, and the need for information concerning such usefulness helps to account for the great satisfaction I have experienced with the occurrence of this panel.

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